

ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF TURKEY

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Common Terns mobbing a
Sea Eagle

Editorial

During the last four months the Society has progressed in a number of important ways, and among these we have two important 'firsts' to record. The first number of the Journal has been published, and the first visit by one of our Turkish friends to this country for training has taken place.

Useful discussions with the Wildlife Section of the Ministry of Agriculture were held in June in Ankara when both Richard Porter and William Wilkinson were on visits to Turkey. Although it has an uphill task, the Wildlife Section is making progress, and is doing all it can to promote the cause of Conservation in Turkey. In this connection, it is worth recording that the Proceedings of the Technical Meeting on Wetland Conservation held in Ankara in October 1967 has now been translated and is available in Turkish.

One of our Vice-Presidents, Professor Kosswig, has now taken up permanent residence in Turkey. His wide knowledge of the country and his contacts with the Universities will be of great help to our Society.

Visit to Britain by Tansu Gulpinar

During June and July the Society was able to arrange the visit of Tansu Gulpinar to this country. Mr. Bayer and Mr. Molu very kindly granted him leave of absence from his duties as Warden of the Manyas Reserve, and he spent approximately six weeks in this country. During this time he studied the activities of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, of the Wildfowl Trust and of the Nature Conservancy. John Berry also showed him a considerable area of Scotland. The visit was an enormous success, and the Society wishes to record its deep gratitude to these organisations and all the people in them who took such trouble to make the visit successful.

It is hoped that it will prove possible in future years to arrange further visits

by young Turkish ornithologists.

Expeditions, and the Collection of Specimens

A word of guidance on this subject might be helpful. Individuals are absolutely free to enter the country as tourists, and naturally are able to carry out ornithological observations during their stay. If, however, they wish to collect specimens (alive or dead) permission must first be obtained from the Wildlife Section of the Ministry of Agriculture.

For formal expeditions it is necessary to obtain permission from the Turkish authorities. Although the Wildlife Section will be consulted, the ultimate right to give or refuse permission resides in the Ministry of the Interior. The correct channel of communication is through the Turkish Embassy which is very helpful in such matters, and four months should be allowed for processing the application.

Naturally, the Society has no official power whatsoever; it is, however, happy to offer guidance and help to those wishing to undertake ornithological activities in Turkey.

Wildfowl Census

The midwinter census is being extended, and an additional census period lasting a week is now scheduled for November. The dates are as follows:

November, 15th - 23rd, 1969
January, 10th - 25th, 1970
November, 14th - 22nd, 1970
January, 9th - 24th, 1971

Reliable counters are in very short supply, and anyone therefore who will be visiting Turkey during these periods who wishes to help should write to William Wilkinson, 119 Castelnau, Barnes, London S.W.13.

The Birds of Greece - a new publication

Any member visiting Greece will be pleased to learn of the recently published "Catalogus Faunae Graeciae" pas 2 aves. Published in German, this book contains much valuable information on the up-to-date distribution of the birds of Greece and can be obtained from Willy Bauer, 6 Frankfurt a.M. Schneckenhofstr, 35, Fed. Republic of Germany, at the price of Dm 17.50 plus packing and postage.

The Annual General Meeting

The A.G.M. of the Foreign Section will be held at Bowmaker House, 55/56 St. James' Street, London S.W.1. on Wednesday, December 3rd, 1969. (The nearest underground Stations are Green Park or Piccadilly.) All members are invited to attend. The meeting, which will commence at 1900 hours, will be of an informal nature and time will be devoted to general discussions.

THE BIRDS OF LAKE APOLYONT

by Alan Kitson

This is the first of a series of articles which will appear in the O.S.T. Bulletins describing good areas for birdwatching in Turkey.

Apolyont Golu lies to the south of the Marmara Sea between Manyas Golu and the town of Bursa. From Istanbul it is a 300km. journey by road, but this distance is greatly shortened with the aid of the inexpensive car ferry from Kartal to Yalova across the Marmara Sea. For the non-camper, Bursa is an excellent place to base oneself, offering a wide range of hotels, restaurants and entertainments. It is Turkey's fourth largest town, and is situated at the foot of Uludag, a magnificent 2,500m snow covered peak rising abruptly behind it. From the mountain a view to the west shows Apolyont lake, heat-haze permitting.

For the ornithologist, Apolyont is probably the most exciting of the three "Marmara Sea Lakes" holding many habitats, which in turn give harbour to, at all seasons, enormous numbers and varieties of birds.



Night Heron - M.J. Helps.

The village of Apolyont is delightfully situated on the north-east side of the lake. Old houses are packed together and crammed onto a tiny island which is joined to a mainland promontory by means of a bridge; fishing boats are moored along the shore. Cypress trees stand like sentries on the hill protecting the village immediately north of the bridge. From here grand views are obtained over the village and beyond to the far shores of the lake. Large water lily beds border the Apolyont promontory and here one can have fine views of a colony of nesting Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*) one of the only two places known that this species nests in Turkey.

Each spring the terns arrive and build their nests of reeds interwoven into the floating lily leaves. The birds are always active and good views are easily obtainable from the shore. They fish mainly in the shallows along the shore. There is usually much noise from the colonies and a hard rasping cry is continually heard from the birds.

Rocky outcrops on and around the Apolyont village promontory form ideal habitat for many passerines such as Black-eared Wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanica*), Sardinian Warbler (*Sylvia melanocephala*), Ruppell's Warbler (*S. ruppelli*), Barred Warbler (*S. nisoria*),



Great Spotted Cuckoo (*Clamator glandarius*), Rufous Bush Chat (*Cercotrichas galactotes*) and Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*), while overhead birds of prey may be seen, including Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) and Short-toed Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*).

Apart from the area around Apolyont village, the northern side of the lake proves, in the eye of the bird-watcher, to be the least productive. Fields of barley and sun flowers with isolated fig trees stretch for the most part to the lake edge and the occasional marshy areas are continually disturbed by shepherds with their sheep flocks, and herds of wallowing water buffalo. There is little suitable habitat for waders.

At the north-west corner of the lake the main Bursa to Karacabey road runs through the village of Uluabat from where a track leads off to the lake. A large, sound embankment has been constructed running along the whole of the western end of the lake to the river Kemal Pasa where it turns west and follows the river. Fortunately, a road kept in good repair stretches the length of the embankment and whether you be on foot or with transport a really productive time may be had "working" the embankment for birds. It was, though, hardly constructed to aid foreign bird watchers and is, in fact, a dam to keep the reclaimed land on the west from flooding. At the start of the embankment, near Uluabat, good numbers of White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) are normally present on migration in spring and autumn, resting and feeding in the shallows not far from the main road. Here one may also see the first of many Spur-winged Plovers (*Vanellus spinosus*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) and Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*).

Along the length of the embankment Black, White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns (*Chidonias niger*, *C. leucopterus*, *C. hybrida*) are to be seen feeding over the water, but only the Black Tern nests in this area.

Willows that line the lake edge hold good numbers of Penduline Tits (*Remiz pendulinus*), their penetrating calls being heard continually. With a little patience close views may be had and their nests are not too difficult to locate, hanging from a small branch with the opening away from the prevailing wind.

In spring, these same bushes are at times alive with small birds "on passage". Species especially numerous are warblers, Whinchats (*Saxicola rubetra*), Flycatchers (*Muscicapa striata* and *Ficedula* sp.) and Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes (*Lanius minor*, *L. collurio*).

In parts poplar trees have been planted in groups immediately west of the embankment to bind the soil and reduce erosion. Few birds are found here and apart from Spanish Sparrows (*Passer hispaniolensis*) and Syrian Woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos syriacus*) they yield little of interest to the ornithologist.

On other stretches, water filled dykes have been left for drainage purposes. These being well overgrown with aquatic vegetation, food is plentiful for birds and many species are to be seen including Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), Great Reed Warbler (*A. arundinaceus*), Moustached Warbler (*Luscinola melanopogon*), Cetti's Warbler (*Cettia cetti*), Little Crane (*Porzana parva*), Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*), Squacco Heron (*Ardeola ralloides*) and Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*). Pond Turtles (*Emys orbicularis*), Grass Snakes (*Natrix natrix*) and numerous frogs (*Rana* sp.) may also be observed.

Before reaching the Kemal Pasa river a large area of scrub-covered land will be noted appearing on the lake side, and the embankment road becomes further away from the water. This will be the delta of the river - where the real bird-watching begins.

The delta is a large area of alluvial silt deposited over the ages by the Kemal Pasa river. At one time it must have been considerably more extensive but with the building of the embankment much was reclaimed and is now agricultural land.

The delta is flat and mainly covered with thick willow and tamarisk scrub, though

Apolyont Foy - R.P. Porter





Whiskered Terns

large open areas of dried mud still exist where Spur-winged Plovers, Stone Curlews (*Burhinus oedicephalus*), Tawny Pipits (*Anthus campestris*), Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella cinerea*) and Crested Larks (*Galerida cristata*) nest. In the bushes Reed, Cetti's and Olivaceous breed. The Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) breeds here and both Montagu's (*C. pygargus*) and Pallid Harriers (*C. macrourus*), feed over the area, on migration. If one has time, a walk across the delta is well worth while. Dangers exist from Spur-winged Plovers executing dive-bomb attacks at intruders too close to their nests, and from occasional patches of sinking sand which are probably not dangerous but may lose one much time in extracting floundering limbs.

Where the delta meets the lake, masses of birds congregate to feed. Waders form the majority and these consist chiefly of Redshank (*Tringa totanus*), Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) and Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*), with smaller numbers of Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*), Avocet (*Recurvirostra avocetta*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus*), Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*), Black-tailed Godwit (*L. limosa*) and occasional Kentish Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*), Temminck's Stints (*Calidris temminckii*) and Broad-billed Sandpipers (*Limicola falcinellus*). Also to be seen in abundance are Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Purple Heron, Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), White Pelican and many gulls (*Larus* sp.) and Terns (*Sterna* sp.). Dalmatian Pelicans (*Pelecanus crispus*) are usually present in small parties.

The delta is a paradise for birds. There is a feeling of desolation, and disturbance to the birds comes only in the form of small herds of wandering cattle and water buffalo. One hopes it will always remain this way.

The delta is divided in two by the river and to reach the southern part one must follow the river a few kilometres to the west and cross it by a bridge, which may or may not be intact depending on the winter rains, to the small village of Ayaspasa. From here a road returns toward Apolyant lake via the larger village of Karoglan. A warm welcome and friendly hospitality is guaranteed from all these villages. One is sure to be "press-ganged" into drinking numerous glasses of tea, sampling the local melon crop, or testing fresh fish from the lake.

Conditions for birds on the southern side of the delta are not so perfect as those on the north. Much of this part has been given over to cultivation and the loss of the natural habitat is apparent. There are rumours too of plans for further reclamation of the delta. The land would then be used for agriculture, the silt deposits drying out and offering a very rich soil.

At the present time rice is grown and large numbers of Little Egrets, Grey, Purple and Squacco Herons, are to be seen feeding in the water-logged paddy fields along with small numbers of Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

and occasional Great-White Egrets (*Egretta alba*). No Heron or Egret colonies have been discovered at Apolyant lake (indeed no suitable undisturbed areas of wet woodland or reed beds exist) and it is thought that the majority of herons, egrets and Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*) on the delta are from the breeding colony at Manyas Golu which lies about 40 km. to the west. Frequently parties of herons are seen flying between the two lakes.

From the mountains stretching along the south side of the lake one has a tremendous view overlooking the delta and across the entire lake. The islands can be clearly seen, particularly the largest, the island of Hailbey, which is easily reached by boat. This is rather a barren and rocky outcrop with scattered vegetation and the only form of food produce is olives. A small variety of bird life is present which includes Rock Nuthatch (*Sitta neumayer*) and Marsh Warbler (*Acrocephalus palustris*). Great Tits (*Parus major*) are extremely common, in fact the commonest bird. The island is a sanctuary for snakes, notably Grass (*Natrix natrix*) and Dice (*Natrix tessellata*), and the bushes along the shore are alive with them.

Birds of prey are fairly easily seen over the hills to the south of the lake and an hour or so will be well spent scanning the sky. The weather is nearly always good in the summer providing plenty of thermals for the soaring birds. Species likely to be seen include Short-toed Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*), Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvis*), Honey Buzzard (*pernis apivorus*) and small falcons (*Falco* sp.). Across the lake a Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) may be fishing. Its presence, usually signalled by the commotion among waders, ducks and herons on the delta, as they panic to escape from its path.

The hills are for the most part, densely covered with nearly impenetrable scrub, chiefly "prickly" oak (*Quercus* sp.) which offers habitat to many birds, notably "sylvia" or "scrub" warblers such as Orphea (*Sylvia hortensis*), Subalpine (*S. cantillans*), Sardinian, Ruppell's and Whitethroat (*S. communis*). Tracks, worn by centuries of goat traffic, lead through the growth and in the more lush valleys Masked Shrikes (*Lanius nubicus*) and Olivaceous Warblers are to be seen. Other species present in good numbers are Cirl Bunting (*Emberiza cirlus*), Ortolan (*E. hortulana*) and Sombre Tit (*Parus lugubris*).

It is possible to hire a boat for a few lira (1 Turkish lira = 8 pence) from the south side across the lake to Apolyant village. Boats are moored along the shore and are owned by the inhabitants of villages in the hills. If the wind is kind and the water smooth this



Little Egrets and Glossy Ibises

boat trip will be a gloriously relaxing one. Few birds are to be seen on the open water, apart from a few Great-crested Grebes (*Podiceps cristatus*) in scatterings over the mill-pond surface, occasional groups of Ferruginous Ducks (*Aythya nyroca*) and perhaps a Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*).

Naturally the winter scene paints a different picture of the lake. Bare trees, cold winds from the Black Sea and snow on the mountains transform the summer picturesque beauty into a barren harshness. Shepherds stand forlorn and desolate in mammoth sheepskin capes; village tea-houses close their doors to keep in the warmth of charcoal stoves. However, compared with Turkish wetland areas further east the Marmara Sea region has a relatively mild winter climate, thus offering more favourable conditions to wintering birds. From the observations and records available it would appear that Apolyant lake holds a far greater bird population (notably wildfowl and the like) in the winter months than either Manyas or Iznik Golu, perhaps because it is able to offer a greater food supply.

On 9th January this year some 25,000 ducks and Coot were counted from the north and west shores. Most of the "usual" duck species were identified in small groups but the majority were too distant for specific identification. Fifteen Smew (*Mergus albellus*) were seen, also 1,000 Whitefronts (*Anser albifrons*), 1,000 Great-crested Grebes and six Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) - a rare species in Turkey. Other species included eight Great White Egrets, a single Sea Eagle, 25 Marsh Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) two Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) and three Moustached Warbler (*Luscinola melanopogon*). And so it is not wildfowl alone that should tempt one to a winter trip to Apolyont.

Apart from hunters, the winter lake population of birds has another, perhaps greater, hazard to contend with. This takes the form of accidental trapping by fishermen.

Fish form an important part of the diet of the local inhabitants at all seasons, and even more so during the winter when often other foods are scarce. The fish are trapped over the whole lake in nets anchored below the surface of the water. Ducks and grebes that dive to catch fish become entangled in the mesh and consequently drown.

One catch was examined this winter. A fisherman moored his boat at Apolyont village and handed out nets containing some 150 birds (approximately 100 Great-crested Grebes, 35 Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) and 15 Smew). He said he would be able to sell the birds for food locally at 50 Kurus (4d.) a bird and for up to 5 lira in town (Bursa). The nets were set to trap fish and the birds caught were an incidental addition to the haul. This was the result of a three-day catch, the usual period for which nets are left unattended. On the large scale, as it is at Apolyont, accidental trapping or diving wildfowl, as illustrated above, must take a heavy toll of the wintering population.

Illustrations by Ian Willis